

**EMPLOYEE TRAVEL MANAGEMENT
OFFICIAL UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT PASSPORTS**

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To provide procedures for applying for and using an official United States Government passport (hereafter referred to as "official passport") when traveling to foreign locations in the discharge of official duties.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook is being issued to document the Department's official passport policy and procedures in the approved directive and handbook format. VA Administrations and staff offices are authorized to develop operational procedures to supplement this handbook, but may not alter any procedures contained in this handbook.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Travel Policy Division (047GC3), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Finance, is responsible for the material contained in this handbook. Comments, questions, or suggestions may be addressed to that office at 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420.
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VA Directive 0631.02, Employee Travel Management: Official United States Government Passports.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** MP-1, part II, chapter 2, paragraph 5, dated February 28, 1995.

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EMPLOYEE TRAVEL MANAGEMENT OFFICIAL UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT PASSPORTS

1. PURPOSE. This handbook provides procedures for applying for (1) official United States Government passports (hereafter referred to as "official passport"), (2) entry visas for foreign countries visited in conjunction with official duties, and (3) country clearance requests from the Department of State prior to commencement of official travel to foreign locations.

2. EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION. All VA employees who travel to foreign locations, including Canada and Mexico, in the discharge of official duties must apply for and receive an official passport prior to commencement of such travel. When required by the country being visited, VA employees must also apply for and receive a visa endorsement on their official passport allowing entry to the country. VA travelers will coordinate requests for official passports, visa endorsements on such passports, and country clearance requests through the Travel Policy Division (047GC3), Office of Financial Policy. These procedures also apply to immediate family members of VA employees who are assigned to permanent duty in foreign locations.

3. VALIDITY OF OFFICIAL PASSPORTS. Official passports are valid for travel abroad only while the traveler maintains the official status for which the official passport and/or visa endorsement was issued. For trips that combine official and personal travel, the traveler must have both an official passport and a personal passport. Official passports may never be used for personal travel.

4. CUSTODIAN OF OFFICIAL PASSPORTS.

a. The Travel Policy Division (047GC3) is the custodian of official passports issued to VA employees or issued to immediate family members accompanying a VA employee on a permanent duty assignment to a foreign location. The Travel Policy Division is accountable for safeguarding official passports while employees or immediate family members to whom the passports were issued are not traveling on official business.

b. Employees and immediate family members must return official passports to the Travel Policy Division within 5 days of the end of any official travel to a foreign location.

c. If an employee or immediate family member fails or refuses to return the official passport to the Travel Policy Division as required under paragraph 4.(b.), the Travel Policy Division will inform the Department of State. The Department of State will take all steps necessary to obtain the official passport, requesting assistance from the U.S. Marshals Service.

5. HOW TO OBTAIN AN OFFICIAL PASSPORT. To obtain an official passport, the employee or immediate family member(s) accompanying a VA employee assigned to permanent duty at a foreign location will submit the following forms and information to the Travel Policy Division at least 1 month in advance of the departure date:

- a. Evidence of approval of foreign travel to include the following information:
 - (1) Name, title and grade of traveler;
 - (2) Countries to be visited and length of stay;
 - (3) Date of departure from, and return to, the United States; and
 - (4) Purpose of trip.
- b. The appropriate Department of State passport application form, including the required documentation to accompany the application form (see paragraph 6).
- c. When necessary, a completed visa application form (see paragraph 7).
- d. Country Clearance Information Sheet (see paragraph 8).

6. DEPARTMENT OF STATE PASSPORT APPLICATION FORMS AND OTHER DOCUMENTATION. Official passports are processed by the Special Issuance Agency (SIA), Department of State. VA travelers should apply for an official passport at least 30 days in advance of travel.

a. For individuals who have never had a passport issued (official or personal), who had a passport that expired more than 15 years prior to the date of application for an official passport, or whose name changed after the issuance of their current passport, the following is required:

- (1) A completed Form DS-11, *Application for a U.S. Passport or Registration*, signed and certified by a local Clerk of the Court, passport agent, or authorized postal employee;
- (2) Two - 2"x2" passport pictures (front facing, light background);
- (3) Birth certificate (must be original with official seal or a certified copy; abstracts are not acceptable), naturalization certificate, or other approved proof of citizenship;
- (4) A clear photocopy of driver's license or other picture identification document issued by a Federal, State, or local government; and

(5) The DS-11, *Application for a U.S. Passport or Registration*, must be certified and an oath administered to the applicant. This certification may be obtained through a passport agent at a Post Office or Clerk of Court office. Once the application is certified, the passport agent may put the application, photographs and supporting documentation into a sealed envelope. If that procedure is used, the envelope should not be opened or the seal broken in any way. The sealed envelope along with other required documentation should be sent to the Travel Policy Division.

b. For those individuals who possess a passport (official or personal) issued within the last 15 years and whose name remains the same as on the passport in their possession, the following is required:

(1) A completed and signed Form DS-82, *Application for a U.S. Passport by Mail*;

(2) The passport currently in their possession; and

(3) Two 2"x2" passport pictures (front facing, light background). (Note: If the traveler is unwilling or unable, due to personal travel, to submit their passport with the application, Form DS-82, *Application for a U.S. Passport by Mail*, cannot be used. In such cases, the DS-11 form, *Application for a U.S. Passport or Registration*, must be completed instead.)

c. VA travelers may obtain passport application forms at:

(1) Post Offices. The Department of State Web site has a search capability to assist travelers in finding the location of post offices that certify passport applications and provide passport application forms. The Web site is: <http://iafdb.travel.state.gov/>.

(2) Department of State Web site. The DS-11, *Application for a U.S. Passport or Registration*, can be downloaded from: <http://travel.state.gov/DS-0011.pdf>, and the DS-82, *Application for a U.S. Passport by Mail*, downloaded from the Web site: <http://travel.state.gov/DS-0082.pdf>.

d. The Department of State will not accept photocopies of passport application forms. Passport application forms must be submitted on either an original printed form or on a form downloaded from the Department of State Web site. When using a downloaded form, the application must be printed back-to-back with the application fields on one side of the form and the instructions on the other side. This will necessitate running the paper onto which the application is being printed through the printer twice -- once to print the application and then reversed to print the instructions.

e. The Department of State Web site indicates that downloaded forms must be clear and sharp. Applications that are blurred or illegible will not be accepted. Downloaded applications must be printed in black print on white paper. The paper must be 8 1/2" by 11", with no holes or perforations, at least medium (20 lb.) weight, and with a matte surface. Thermal paper, dye-sublimation paper, special inkjet paper, and other

shiny papers are not acceptable. Applicants must ensure that the photograph area on the printed application form is 2"x2" so that the passport photograph submitted with the application can be correctly attached.

f. All documentation provided with the official passport application will be returned upon issue of the official passport by the Department of State.

g. VA travelers should, when available, use government resources to obtain passport photographs, but such photographs must meet the following Department of State standards:

(1) 2"x2" in size, with the face image size measured from the bottom of the traveler's chin to the top of the head (including hair) not being less than 1" and not more than 1 3/8";

(2) Photograph is of the applicant alone, sufficiently recent (normally taken within the last 6 months), and must be in color, clear, and with full front view of the face;

(3) Taken in normal street attire, without a hat, head covering, or dark glasses unless a signed statement is submitted by the applicant verifying the item is worn daily for religious purposes or a signed doctor's statement is submitted verifying the item is worn daily for medical purposes;

(4) Photographs retouched so that the traveler's appearance is changed are unacceptable, as are snapshots, vending machine prints, and magazine or full-length photographs;

(5) Printed on thin paper with plain light (white or off-white) background and capable of withstanding a mounting temperature of 225° Fahrenheit;

(6) Digitized photos must meet the previously stated qualifications and will be accepted for use at the discretion of Passport Services; and

(7) Digital photographs are acceptable provided they meet the previously stated qualifications and are high resolution photography, fine facial features are discernable and in focus, the resulting print exhibits a continuous tone quality regardless of the print method used, and the print is produced without discernable pixels or dot patterns.

h. Any reasonable cost incurred by the traveler may be reimbursed as a miscellaneous expense on the travel voucher. This includes cost to obtain photographs; to obtain birth or naturalization certificates; to have the DS-11, *Application for a U.S. Passport or Registration*, certified by a local Clerk of the Court, passport agent, or authorized postal employee; or to send documents via U.S. mail (when use of station mail facilities is not feasible).

7. VISAS. Foreign travel to some countries requires specific entry visas.

a. The Travel Policy Division is responsible for obtaining visas for foreign travel. Since different countries have specific entry requirements, VA travelers must contact the Travel Policy Division to determine any additional documentation required by the country being visited.

b. Certain countries will require a transit visa if the traveler is making an airplane connection in that country. VA travelers should provide the Travel Policy Division information on any in-transit stops anticipated while on official travel to a foreign location, no matter how short the duration.

c. Some visa applications will require photographs. The Travel Policy Division will inform travelers of the specific requirements of the country being visited.

d. Granting a visa is solely at the discretion of the country being visited. Visas are often date-specific. If, after applying for a visa, the travel dates change, the traveler must notify the Travel Policy Division immediately so that the visa application can be amended. Failure to do so may cause the traveler to be denied entry to the country upon arrival.

8. COUNTRY CLEARANCE FORM. The Department of State requires a country clearance for all official travel to foreign locations.

a. The desk officer at the Department of State must request permission for the traveler to enter the country from the U.S. ambassador assigned to that country. Federal travelers on official U.S. Government business may not enter the country until such clearance is requested and obtained.

b. The Travel Policy Division will coordinate all country clearances for VA travelers visiting a foreign location on official U.S. Government business.

c. To request a country clearance, VA travelers must complete all information requested on VA Form 0858. This form may be downloaded from the Web site <http://vaww.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA0858.pdf>.

d. Because all travel arrangements may not be complete at the time of the request for an official passport, the VA "Country Clearance Information" form may be submitted separate from the passport application form. However, the Country Clearance Information form must be submitted to the Travel Policy Division at least 2 weeks prior to the start of the official travel.

e. The Travel Policy Division will not release any official passports to travelers who fail to submit a complete Country Clearance Information form.

f. If after submitting the Country Clearance Information form, the dates of travel change, the traveler must notify the Travel Policy Division immediately. The Travel Policy Division will notify the appropriate desk officer to amend the country clearance request.

g. Granting country clearances is solely at the discretion of the U.S. ambassador assigned to the country being visited. Depending on the specific country being visited and country conditions, VA travelers who do not apply for country clearances may be denied entry by the U.S. embassy upon arrival.

9. MAILING OFFICIAL PASSPORT, VISA, AND COUNTRY CLEARANCE INFORMATION.

a. The Department of State will only process applications for an official passport that are submitted by the Travel Policy Division. Travelers who submit such applications directly to the Department of State will either have the applications returned or processing suspended.

b. Applications for official passports, including photographs and other documentation, visa applications, Country Clearance Information forms, and evidence of approval of foreign travel must be shipped by traceable means to:

Department of Veterans Affairs
Travel Policy Division (047GC3)
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

c. The documentation involved in applying for an official passport is sensitive and not easily replaceable. For that reason, the application package should not be sent through interoffice mail or through non-traceable U.S. Post Office mail. In addition, irradiation of regular postal mail may be harmful to photographs and official documents such as birth certificates.

d. Travelers at VACO may present application forms in person and may have their applications certified by the Travel Policy Division passport acceptance agents. VACO employees should make arrangements to present their application package by contacting the Travel Policy Division on (202) 273-9375. VACO employees must call to ensure that a Travel Policy Division passport acceptance agent is on duty to accept application packages. These packages should never be left unattended in the offices of Travel Policy Division employees.

10. LOST OR STOLEN OFFICIAL PASSPORTS. VA travelers are responsible for safeguarding their official passport while in their possession (see Appendix B for foreign travel tips). The loss of the official passport may cause unnecessary travel complications.

a. If the traveler's official passport is lost or stolen while abroad, the traveler should report the loss immediately to the local police and to the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. The consular office will issue a temporary official passport in such situations. The traveler should return the temporary passport to the Travel Policy Division upon return to their duty station.

b. If the traveler's official passport is lost or stolen while in the United States prior to or immediately after travel, the traveler must complete a Form DS-64, *Statement Regarding A Lost Or Stolen Passport*, and submit it to the Travel Policy Division, Office of Financial Policy (047GC3) for processing.

c. Upon completion of the DS-64, the traveler may reapply for a replacement passport.

d. If after reporting an official passport as lost or stolen, the passport is located, travelers should not attempt to use it. Filing the DS-64 invalidates the passport, and it cannot be used for travel. (The information provided on the DS-64 is placed into the Department of State's Consular Lost or Stolen Passport System. Anyone using a passport reported as lost or stolen on the DS-64 may be detained when presenting the passport to Customs or Immigration personnel.) Should travelers locate an official passport previously reported as lost or stolen, they must immediately submit it to the Travel Policy Division, who will present it to the Department of State for disposal.

11. RE-USE OF OFFICIAL PASSPORT. Official passports are valid for 5 years from date of issue. Upon the completion of each episode of foreign travel, official passports must be returned to the Travel Policy Division for safekeeping. A traveler's official passport is available for use for further official travel to foreign locations. The official passport will be returned to the traveler upon the receipt of evidence of approval of foreign travel and a completed Country Clearance Information form.

12. AMENDING OFFICAL PASSPORT FOR CHANGE OF NAME.

a. VA travelers may request an amendment for a change of name to their official passport by filing a DS-19, *U.S. Passport Amendment/Validation Application*.

b. The application must be supported with sufficient documentation such as a certified court order, marriage certificate, or other satisfactory evidence to support a change of name.

c. The VA traveler must submit a completed, signed, DS-19, *U.S. Passport Amendment/Validation Application*, to the Travel Policy Division at the address stated in paragraph 9.b. The Travel Policy Division will request amendment of the official passport from the SIA.

13. TRANSFER OF CUSTODY FOR OFFICIAL PASSPORT. Official passports are issued into the custody of the traveler's agency. In the event that a VA traveler transfers to another agency, the traveler should notify the Travel Policy Division. The Travel Policy Division will contact the gaining agency and the Department of State and transfer the employee's official passport to the custody of the gaining agency.

14. CONTACTING THE TRAVEL POLICY DIVISION. The Travel Policy Division maintains a Passport Help Line for inquiries on the procedures to obtain official passports, visas, and country clearances. Travelers may call (202) 273-9375.

OFFICIAL UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT PASSPORT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What should I do when I receive my passport?

a. Sign it right away! Complete page 3, the personal notification data page. (For the emergency contact, do not include the name of your traveling companion; instead, write in pencil the name, address, and telephone number of someone who is not traveling with you.)

b. Your previous passport and other documents that you may have submitted will be returned to you with your new passport.

2. What should I do when I lose my passport or it is stolen?

a. It is important that you safeguard your passport. Its loss could cause you unnecessary travel complications. If your passport is lost or stolen abroad, you should report the loss immediately to the local police and to the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. If you can provide the consular officer with the information contained in your passport, it will facilitate issuance of a new passport. It is a good idea to make two photocopies of the data page of your passport. Keep one copy separately from your passport to take with you on your trip, and leave the other copy with a relative or friend in the United States. It is also a good idea to carry two extra passport size photos with you.

b. If your passport is lost or stolen in the United States, contact the Travel Policy Division, Office of Financial Policy (047GC3) immediately at (202) 273-9375 so that office can facilitate issuing a new one.

3. How should I safeguard my passport?

a. ***Your passport is the most valuable document that you will carry abroad.*** It confirms your United States citizenship, and an official passport provides additional protections. However, an official passport is not a diplomatic passport – you must obey the laws of the country you visit.

b. Please guard your passport carefully. Do not use it as collateral for a loan or lend it to anyone. It is your best form of identification. In addition to providing it when entering a foreign country and for reentry into the United States, you may need to show your passport when picking up mail, checking into hotels, and prior to boarding aircraft abroad. You should always produce your passport when conducting business at United States embassies and consulates.

c. Carelessness is the main cause for losing a passport or having it stolen. You may find that you have to carry your passport with you because you need to show it when you cash traveler's checks or the country that you are visiting requires you to

Appendix A

carry it as an identity document. When you must carry your passport, hide it securely. Do not leave it in a handbag or in an exposed pocket. Whenever possible, leave your passport in the hotel safe, not in an empty hotel room, and not packed in your luggage. One family member should not carry all the passports for the entire family.

4. How can I guard against thieves when abroad?

a. Coat pockets, handbags, and hip pockets are particularly susceptible to theft. Thieves will use all kinds of ploys to divert your attention just long enough to pick your pocket or grab your purse or wallet. These ploys include creating a disturbance, spilling something on your clothing, or even handing you a baby to hold!

b. You can try to prevent theft by carrying your belongings in a secure manner. For example, consider not carrying a purse or wallet when going along crowded streets. Women who carry a shoulder bag should keep it tucked under the arm and held securely by the strap. Men should put their wallets in their front trouser pockets or use money belts instead of hip pockets. A wallet wrapped in rubber bands is more difficult to remove without notice. Be especially cautious in a large crowd, in the subway, on buses, at the marketplace, at a festival, or if surrounded by groups of vagrant children. Do not make it easy for thieves!

5. May I keep my official passport after my business abroad has been completed?

No. An Official U.S. Government passport is a document from our government to the government of another country requesting travel privileges for the bearer into, through, and/or from that country. It remains the property of the United States at all times and must be returned to the Travel Policy Division by the most expeditious and traceable means – please do not return your passport by regular mail! You should return your passport to:

Department of Veterans Affairs
Travel Policy Division (047GC3)
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

6. When do I use my official Government passport? You may use your official U.S. Government passport ONLY when going overseas in discharge of your official duties. You must not use the official U.S. Government passport when you leave the United States for personal travel, or when entering countries where you will not conduct official business. For personal travel, you need to obtain a regular personal (tourist) passport.

7. May I hold both an official U.S. Government and regular tourist passport? You may hold both a valid personal (tourist) passport and a valid official passport at the same time. You may want to take both types of passports with you when traveling abroad on official business. You **MUST** take a personal passport with you if you plan to take personal travel overseas. Please be sure you have all appropriate visas for both types of passports prior to your departure.

8. How can I learn about the countries that I plan to visit? The following suggestions and sources may be useful:

a. Foreign embassies or consulates in the United States can provide up-to-date information on their countries. Addresses and telephone numbers of the embassies of foreign governments are listed in the Congressional Directory, available at most public libraries. In addition to their embassies, some countries also have consulates in major U.S. cities. Look for their addresses in your local telephone directory, or find them in the publication, Foreign Consular Offices in the United States, available in many public libraries, or on the Internet at <http://www.state.gov>

b. The Department of State publishes Background Notes on countries worldwide. These are brief, factual pamphlets with information on each country's culture, history, geography, economy, government, and current political situation. The Background Notes are available for approximately 170 countries. They often include a reading list, travel notes and maps. To purchase copies, you can contact the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402, or call (202) 512-1800. Select issues are also available from the Department of State's Bureau of Public Affairs, fax-on-demand, by calling (202) 736-7720 from your fax machine or on the Department of State's Internet home page at <http://www.state.gov>.

c. The Consular Information Program provides pertinent information for travelers. The Department of State issues fact sheets, known as Consular Information Sheets, on every country in the world. You should obtain the Department of State's Consular Information Sheet for any country that you will visit. The sheets contain information about crime and security conditions, areas of instability, and other details pertaining to travel in a particular country. You may find these Consular Information Sheets at http://travel.state.gov/travel_warnings.html.

d. The Department of State also issues Travel Warnings and Public Announcements. Travel Warnings are issued when the Department of State recommends deferral of travel by Americans to a country because of civil unrest, dangerous conditions, terrorist activity and/or because the United States has no diplomatic relations with the country and cannot assist an American citizen in distress. Public Announcements are issued as a means to disseminate information quickly about terrorist threats and other relatively short-term and/or transnational conditions, which would pose significant risks to American travelers.

e. Consular Information Sheets, Travel Warnings and Public Announcements may also be heard at any time by dialing the Office of Overseas Citizens Services, American Citizens Services and Crisis Management, Bureau of Consular Affairs, at (202) 647-5225 from a touchtone phone. The recording is updated as new information becomes available. Consular Information Sheets, Travel Warnings and Public Announcements may also be obtained from any regional passport agency, from most airline computer

reservation systems, from U.S. embassies or consulates abroad, or by sending your request, (indicating the desired country on the lower left corner of the envelope), in a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the Office of Overseas Citizens Services, Bureau of Consular Affairs, Room 4811, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC 20520-4818.